

September 6, 2006

Dr. Laura Alvarenga
Superintendent of Schools
San Rafael Unified School District
310 Nova Albion Way
San Rafael, California 94903

Dear Dr. Alvarenga:

This letter speaks to the request to and the refusal to remove the following book from the approved reading list of Davidson Middle School (presumably at other schools in your district as well), *The Bronze Bow* by Elizabeth George Speare. Permit me to briefly introduce myself and set out some of my credentials. In my capacity as then founding vice chairperson of the Marin Community Foundation (MCF) and as a scholar, I worked at length with Davidson School during the Mac Magic Program, co-funded and supported by your district, MCF, the George Lucas Foundation, National Geographic, and Apple Computer. My role each week was to work with the students on understanding the life stories and appreciating the diverse experiences and values represented in the class. I was a co-founder of the Marin Interfaith Council and I have served this community in a variety of capacities for twenty-five years including working with four school districts. I was a member of the Honors College Faculty at the University of Oregon and a visiting lecturer at San Francisco Theological Seminary. I have led international scholars' conferences focused on moral values, the Nazi period, Holocaust-era rescuers, human dignity and civil and human rights, diversity, and education, at Princeton, Oxford, Moscow and St. Petersburg (formerly the USSR), and in Marin. I was the organizer of Marin's first Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, helping to engage all of the schools of Marin in observing the holiday and I assisted in the development of a curriculum written by Marin's honored teacher, Virginia Franklin, a curriculum that was adopted by the King Center in Atlanta. I am a theologian by training and I have researched (funding by the National Endowment for the Humanities) and written two books and contributed eleven chapters to texts dealing with The Holocaust and those who saved Jews and others from destruction.

I recently read Speare's book. It is indeed well written and understandably the recipient of the John Newberry Medal. It is a compelling work of fiction for those who have some sympathy for certain expressions of Christianity. The qualities that make it an

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arguably suitable work for Christian and general readers are precisely the qualities that argue for its removal from the approved reading lists of public schools. The focus of the text is largely triumphalist Christianity, a view held today almost solely by Christian fundamentalist sects and rejected by scholars as the source of historical anti-Semitism and a misreading of the Christian narrative. The book is replete with regrettable, sometimes subtle implications that elevate Christianity over Judaism. The story line carelessly and consistently devalues the Jewish lifestyle and religious experiences of the protagonist while casting the message and person of Jesus as superior to or the replacement for his own faith. In the interest of your time and a lengthy letter, I will not recite the salient offending passages, but I am prepared to fax you a copy of the offending paragraphs that are liberally scattered throughout the text.

I strongly support the request being made to immediately remove this book from all of the approved reading lists of schools in the San Rafael Unified School District, at all grade levels. The book is fictionalized Christianity. It misrepresents the historical reality of our Scripture and does not fairly or adequately report Judaism or Jewish practices of that era. It fosters a subtle but dangerous stereotype of Jesus, his life and works, Christianity, and Judaism. I would go so far as to say that the triumphal nature of Speare's story invites a negative comparison of Judaism to a singularly positive representation of Christianity, and that is the basic definition of anti-Semitism.

Because this fiction misrepresents the essential Christian story and core Jewish religious life and practice and because it is patently a religious book and not a traditional literary work, there is no basis for it to be taught in or on an approved reading list for public schools. It crosses the barrier intended to prevent one religion from proposing its worth over another and encouraging people to leave their tradition to practice another one. If the school district feels compelled to teach about Christianity, Judaism, and other religions the instruction must be limited to broad, fair, and accurate historical representations and it must do so in a manner that does not diminish one tradition at the expense of another, as this book clearly does.

I urge you and the curriculum committee for the district to remove this book from the approved lists and prevent its use as a formal teaching text in your schools. The book is offensive to Christians and Jews. It also belies the work that we did for the district at Davidson in the Mac Magic Program in that it does not inspire cross-cultural or inter-religious respect and understanding. I formally offer to meet with you and your curriculum committee to review the issues raised in this letter. I look forward to your response and sincerely thank you for taking the time to read this letter and consider my studies opinions.

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Sincerely yours,

Douglas K. Huneke, DD
Senior Minister

cc: Dr. Edward Colucci, Principal, Davidson Middle School
Dr. Beck Rosales, Assistant Superintendent
Chairperson, Curriculum Committee, San Rafael Unified School District
The Rev. Ms. Carol Hovis, Marin Interfaith Council
Rabbi Stacy Friedman, Congregation Rodef Sholom
Rabbi Douglas Kahn, Jewish Community Relations Council